

“THE PLACE OF SPLENDOR AND LIGHT”:  
OBSERVATIONS ON THE PARAPHRASING OF ENN 4.8.1  
IN THE *THEOLOGY OF ARISTOTLE*\*

The scholarly consensus on the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* is that this is a product of the illustrious circle of translators headed by al-Kindī in ninth-century Baghdad: a “translation-cum-paraphrase of Plotinus,” worked out in a “purposeful and systematic,” even “philosophically sophisticated” way<sup>1</sup>. The man working for al-Kindī was probably a Christian monk, quite possibly a Melkite from Western Syria, familiar with both the Bible and the Koran, and with some knowledge of Greek philosophical texts. This person was in all likelihood Ibn Nā’ima al-Himsī<sup>2</sup>. It is also generally accepted that the text often features “complete departures from the Greek, ranging in length from one sentence to entire paragraphs,” and that such passages contain “non-Plotinian philosophical doctrines”<sup>3</sup>.

There is, however, no consensus on the exact provenance of this non-Plotinian material. “The usual suspects” are Porphyry, Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, traditional Christian, or traditional Islamic thought<sup>4</sup>.

In this essay we propose a historical-terminological analysis of *Theology of Aristotle* (henceforth *ThA*) with the aim of advancing the discus-

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<sup>1</sup> P. ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle*, London, 2002, p. 1, 3, 12 (= ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*).

<sup>2</sup> F. ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins of the So-Called Theology of Aristotle*, in J. KRAY – W.F. RYAN – C.B. SCHMITT (ed.), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The “Theology” and Other Texts*, London, 1986, p. 116, 118, 136 (= ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*); ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 19. For the hypothesis of a “Jacobite” translator, see L. RUBIO, *Pseudo-Aristoteles. Teologia*, Madrid, 1978, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 6, 11.

<sup>4</sup> For traditional Christian materials, see P. KRAUS, *Plotin chez les Arabes: Remarques sur un nouveau fragment de la paraphrase arabes des Ennéades*, in *Bulletin de L’Institut d’Egypte*, 23 (1941), p. 263-295. For the presence of Koranic allusions in AP, see ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 142. For Porphyry, see P. THILLET, *Indices porphyriens dans la Théologie d’Aristote*, in P.M. SCHUHL – P. HADOT (ed.), *Le Néoplatonisme* (Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Sciences Humaines, Royaumont 9-13 Juin 1969), Paris, 1971, p. 293-302 and S. PINÈS, *Les textes dits plotinien et le courant ‘porphyrien’ dans le néoplatonisme grec*, *ibid.*, p. 303-317. For Ps.-Dionysius: C. D’ANCONA COSTA, *Recherches sur le Liber de Causis*, Paris, 1995 (= D’ANCONA COSTA, *Recherches*).

sion on the nature of the paraphrase. More specifically, we shall discuss the points of divergence from the original, the guiding principles that determined this specific translation technique, and the possible provenance of the non-Plotinian material. Taking as our model the analysis already undertaken by Zimmermann in his fundamental study, we will first offer a detailed textual presentation of the differences between Plotinus' *Ennead* 4:8:1 and the Arabic Plotinus in *ThA* I.1:21-33. This fragment is not only illustrative of al-Himsī's translation procedure, but, indeed, a crucial one in the history of reception, "perhaps the most influential single portion of AP, appearing widely in Islamic and Jewish literature, as a sort of Neoplatonic commonplace."<sup>5</sup> After systematizing the textual observations, in order to discern certain patterns of the translation/ paraphrase, we will show how the outlined textual divergence reflects certain philosophical divergences. In the third section, we will then discuss the intervening influences that shaped the translation, and transformed Plotinus into the Arabic Plotinus. We hold that the Christian influences discernible in the text are not minimal and accidental, but rather purposeful, relatively numerous and substantial. We will argue that *ThA* is clearly influenced by the vocabulary of Syriac ascetical and mystical literature, and that it appears to be aware of certain debates between various types of pagan and Christian Neoplatonism. Finally, in the fourth section, we will adduce more elements to strengthen the thesis of Christian elements in *ThA*, by analyzing some of the passages where P and AP speak of individual pagan philosophers. The conclusions will highlight the punctual contributions made in this paper on several problems in the current research on *ThA*.

### 1. *From Plotinus to The Arabic Plotinus: A Description of the Textual Divergences*<sup>6</sup>

For the sake of convenience, the passages to be analyzed below are printed on two columns in the Appendix to this study. In what follows, P stands for Plotinus, *ThA* for "Theology of Aristotle," and AP for "Arabic Plotinus."

Sent. 21. The key elements of P are preserved: the time indication ("oftentimes") and the description of ecstatic experience as an interior

<sup>5</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 210, n. 67.

<sup>6</sup> For the Arabic text of the *Theology*, we are using the text in A. BADAWĪ, *Plotinus apud Arabes*, Cairo, 1955. The Greek text of the *Enneads*, and G. Lewis' English translation of the corresponding passages of the *ThA* are taken from P. HENRY – H.-R. SCHWYZER (ed.), *Plotini Opera*, Paris, 1959, vol. 2, p. 225-227.

ascent: becoming interior to the self and exterior to all things. AP seems to add some explanatory elements to Plotinus' elegant formula. Thus, ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος is explained as “stripping the body,” “laying it aside,” so as to remain “alone with the soul,” “as it were naked substance.”

The use of such language is quite significant. Rooted in the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism, present in the New Testament, prominent in early Syriac texts such as *Odes of Solomon* and *Acts of Thomas*, as well as in the later writings of Aphrahat, Ephrem Syrus, and Ps.-Macarius<sup>7</sup>, clothing metaphors are a characteristic element of Syriac Christian literature. Zimmermann admits that this usage may have influenced the *ThA*'s curious insistence on the “doffing of the body,” but he remains reserved<sup>8</sup>. It would have been, however, quite natural for a Syriac monk of the ninth century, who also gives a Pauline twist to Enn 4.8.1 (in Sent 24), to use certain expressions typical of his tradition in a paraphrase of the same Plotinian text.

Sent. 22. In this sentence AP preserves the sequential description of the ecstasis (beholding — beauty — marvel). Plotinus' conviction of belonging “now more than ever” (τότε μάλιστα), that is, in the experience just described, to the highest fate (τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας), is transformed into a statement about being “one of the parts of the divine world.” AP simplifies (misinterprets?) ζώην τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας, “enacting the noblest life,” by slashing ἀρίστην and reusing ἐνεργήσας so as to obtain “active life,” *hayā fa'āla*. Moreover, “active life” here also accounts for P's second reference to “energy”: εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἔλθὼν ἐκείνην. In a similar fashion, the crucial statement about his ac-

<sup>7</sup> For the New Testament, see 1 Cor 15:49-54, 2 Cor 5:1-5, Gal 3:27, Rom 13:14, Eph 4:22-24. For early Syriac literature, see S. P. BROCK, *Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition*, in M. SCHMIDT – C.F. GEYER (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, Regensburg, 1982, p. 11-38; A. DE CONICK – J. FOSSUM, *Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas*, in *Vigiliae Christianae*, 45 (1991), p. 123-150. For the Second Temple background and trajectories to fourth-century Mesopotamia, see A. GOLITZIN, *Recovering the “Glory of Adam”: “Divine Light” Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia*, in J.R. DAVILA (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*. Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001, Leiden – Boston, 2003, p. 275-308.

<sup>8</sup> “While the Greeks had tended to doff things so as to achieve a state of nakedness the Syrians tended to doff one thing in order to don another ... But other instances [for a collection of such instances, see p. 228, n. 38] show that what our adaptor had in mind was the doffing of this worldliness with a view to donning the splendour of the higher world.” Nevertheless, “who could care to say that a predilection for clothing metaphors was unthinkable in a writer of Christian Greek or Arabic?” (ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 114).

quired oneness with the divine (τῷ θεῷ εἰς ταῦτὸν γεγεννημένος) may have been absorbed into the prior “one of the parts of the divine world.”

Sent. 23. What follows in 23 is a complex procedure. After the note about “coming to identity with the divine,” P only adds that the soul is “set firm” or “established” in the divine (ἐν αὐτῷ ἰδρυθεὶς), that is, “above any other intelligible thing” (ὕπερ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἐμαυτὸν ἰδρύσας). AP, however, adds an entire sentence, in which “the divine world” appears clearly distinct from “intelligible world”: “... I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine world, *min dālika l-‘ālamī ilā l-ālami l-ilāhī* ... so as to be above the entire intelligible world....”

This raises the problem of terminological inconsistency, because sent. 22 had already used “divine world” in rendering P’s “one with the divine” by “one of the parts of the ... divine world.” However, “that world” in sent. 23 obviously refers back to the realm “within myself” where “that world” is “the entire intelligible world,” which sent. 23 sees as inferior to the “divine world” (properly so called). AP’s interior topology is more clearly presented in the second half of sent. 25, where the experience of ascent is called to mind:

my soul once had the power to leave her body behind and return to herself  
and rise to the world of mind  
and then to the divine world until she entered the place of splendor and  
light (25).

Thus, we obtain: the divine world; the world of mind/ intelligible world; and, finally, thought and reflection, which are all functions proper to the soul still “outside” herself.

Sent. 24. Contemplation of the divine world is expressed in a surprisingly non-philosophical language: “as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend” seems to echo New Testament passages in which the Apostle Paul gives an account of his mystical-visionary experiences. Two such passages are particularly significant: 1 Cor. 2:9-10 (“But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”), and 2 Corinthians 12:1 (“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a one was caught up to the third heaven ... caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”)

Whatever the case, this passage in *ThA* is completely unparalleled in P, and entirely an expansion. In this case, given that the translator stands under no constraints from the original text, the fragment allows us an insight into AP's *own* conceptual world and literary conventions. Notwithstanding the fact that "by the ninth century an exact Arabic version of that verse [1 Cor 2:10] was circulating among Muslims as a certified saying of the Prophet,<sup>9</sup>" it should be noted that the connection between Enn 4.8.1 and Pauline accounts of heavenly ascent was already established in Patristic literature<sup>10</sup>, and that, in general, al-Himsī's eighth-century predecessors viewed Paul's mystical experience as paradigmatic and normative<sup>11</sup>.

As we will discuss further down, a number of other occurrences in the text do, indeed, suggest that the mind of the translator is shaped in important ways by the Christian element.

Sent. 25. P simply notes that the soul descends, and voices his amazement at the fact that the soul has ever entered the body. AP again seems extremely cautious to both translate and preempt any misinterpretation, by detailing every step of the journey. AP compensates the lack of textual basis in P at that point by reverting to an earlier statement in P: "there comes a moment of descent from intellection to reasoning."

Sent. 26. AP preserves the P's paradox (even in the body, *καίπερ οὐσα ἐν σώματι*, the soul is independent, *καθ' ἑαυτήν*), but introduces two clarifications. First, the greatness that has been revealed about the soul is her luminous character; second, he emphasizes the fact that the soul has not exited the body, *ḡayr hārīḡa*.

<sup>9</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, P. Hadot's note on *Ennead* 4.8.1: "Saint Ambroise (dans son sermon *De Isaac* IV.11 ...) rapproche cette extase de Plotin de l'extase de saint Paul (cf. I<sup>er</sup> Epître aux Corinthiens, 12, 1-4): 'Bienheureuse l'âme qui pénètre les secrets du Verbe. Car, s'éveillant du corps, devenant étrangère à toute autre chose, elle cherche à l'intérieur d'elle-même, elle scrute, pour savoir si, de quelque manière, elle pourrait atteindre l'être divin. Et lorsqu'elle a pu enfin saisir celui-ci, dépassant toute autre réalité spirituelle, elle place en lui sa demeure et se nourrit de lui. Tel était Paul qui savait qu'il avait été ravi jusqu'au paradis; mais ravi en son corps ou en dehors de son corps il ne le savait pas. Car son âme s'était éveillée de son corps et elle s'était éloignée et élevée hors des sentiments et des liens de la chair et, ainsi devenu étranger à lui-même, il reçut en lui-même des paroles ineffables qu'il entendit et ne put divulguer, car, remarque-t-il, il n'est pas permis à l'homme de dire ces choses.' Ce qui a frappé saint Ambroise, c'est que, d'une part, saint Paul disait qu'il ne savait pas s'il avait été ravi en son corps ou hors de son corps, et que, d'autre part, Plotin parlait d'un éveil hors du corps. Il n'hésite donc pas à décrire l'extase de saint Paul en des termes qui sont empruntés à l'extase de Plotin." P. HADOT, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, Paris<sup>2</sup>, 1973, p. 26-27, n. 1.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Joseph Hazzaya, in a *memra* quoted by R. BEULAY, *La lumière sans forme: Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale*, Chevetogne, 1987, p. 167.

In short, the following characteristic elements of the translation-cum-paraphrase must be retained: conflation of several passages with certain key-words into one single statement<sup>12</sup>; elimination of possibly undesirable ideas<sup>13</sup>; attempt of systematizing P's statements<sup>14</sup>; occasional insertion of Christian mystical vocabulary. In what follows, we will try to show that the textual divergences, whether small alterations or complete departures from the source-material, are not accidental or gratuitous, but purposeful and justified by a specific philosophical agenda.

## 2. *From Plotinus to the Arabic Plotinus: the Philosophical Divergence*

### *Ascent to God in Enn 4.8.1 and Its Arabic Paraphrase*

Plotinus offers a henological philosophy about the first cause of all things. On this apophatic view, the first cause of things is the cause of being and thinking, while at the same time radically transcending being and thinking; consequently, the first cause is not an intelligible substance. In Plotinus' view, the soul unites herself with the One in a mystical, i.e., transnoetic vision. Moreover, the cause of all is not the actuality of being, but *beyond* it. And since the actuality of being is form — here Plotinus follows Aristotle — the One is beyond forms. One may call the One formless only in the sense of transcending form (Enn 5.9.5).

Consequently, the One is beyond substance, being, intelligibility, actuality, form. Plotinus' first cause is, in a word, transcendent. In this case, to say that the cause of all is beyond life, assuming here that life is actuality, is to say that the cause of all is an outpouring of life/ actuality, an *ekstasis*, not life itself. It is clear now that the three *proper* henological names in Plotinus are One, cause, and *ekstasis*. The difficulty lies in showing how Plotinus understands the *properness* of these three henological names (this shall be made clear below).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Sent. 22: “active life” for both ζώην τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας and εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἐλθὼν ἐκείνην.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., the elimination of μοῖρα in Sent. 21. Adamson notes other similar occurrences: “Having paraphrased up to *Enn.* VI.7.6.19 ..., the Adaptor skips a stretch of Greek containing reference to pagan demons and gods, and then picks up at *Enn.* VI.7.7.18, leaving out 35 lines of Greek. *Perhaps the Adaptor was embarrassed or simply uninterested in the pagan material*” (ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 14. Emphasis ours). On the problem of God not knowing the lower world (*Enn.* V.3.13 and DS 123-5 [b 175]), “[the Adaptor] says that if the First does not think or perceive what is below Him, ‘from this follows what is repugnant.’ Quite likely, the repugnant result he has in mind is that providence would be impossible, which is unacceptable given the religious context of AP (either Christian or Muslim)” (ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 101).

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Sent. 22: the sequence “world of thought” — “world of intellect” — divine world.

In the two columns below we compare Enn 4.8.1 with another Plotinian text dealing with the ascent of the soul. We shall discuss their relationship, clarify in which sense this ascent and union must be understood in each of the two texts, and how we should understand, if we are to remain fair to Plotinus' intentions, the language in which the mystic describes the One.

Enn 4.8.1	Enn 6.9.9
Often I have woken up out of the body to myself and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of Intellect.	But again she [the soul] comes to hate her shames here below, and purifies herself of the things of this world and sets herself on the way to her father and fares well. ... But whoever has seen knows what I am saying," that the soul then has another life and draws near and has already come near and has a part in him, and so is in a state to know that the giver of true life is present and we need nothing more. But quite otherwise, we must put away other things and take our stand only in this, and become this alone, cutting away all the other things in which we are encased; so we must be eager to go out from here and be impatient at being bound to the other things, that we may embrace him with the whole of ourselves and have no part with which we do not touch God.

Plotinus believes that, as activity, mystical union, can mean either (i) the *process* of mystical union, the soul's "setting herself on the way" to the One (Enn 6.9.9), which guarantees neither temporary union nor permanent union; or (ii) the ascent to the One followed by a return to the body (a "vision" "interrupted," "bothered by the body," Enn 6.9.10); or (iii) perfect union with the One: "having uninterrupted vision" (Enn 6.9.9).

The language used in Enn 4.8.1 may appear similar to the one used in Enn 6.9.9: according to both accounts, in ascent the soul leaves one way of living and takes on another; on the other hand, the soul identifies herself, in contemplation, with the contemplated cause, a cause that gives her "rest," and in which she finds herself "restored". Apparently, even if the two testimonies are intended to describe different phenomena — which I will discuss below — they seem to articulate these different experiences in the same way. Such is not the case, however.

In Enn. 4.8.1, the contemplated cause is not the First Cause, but Intellect. In Enn. 6.9.9, the contemplated cause is the first cause, the One. The mystic "touches the One," enjoying fully, "recognizing" in a "uninterrupted vision," "the presence" of the One, in the likeness of the

One (Enn 6.9.9-10). It is noteworthy that in Enn 4.8.1 the soul's "identity" with the contemplated cause is said to be characteristic of a life "perfect," "divine," a life of "utter actuality." On the other hand, there is no mention in Enn. 6.9.9 of any such descriptions. Remaining alone with the One, finding "rest" in the One, being "restored" by the One, and loving the true object of love, the soul is no longer said to have a "life," to be "actual" or "divine." In Enn 6.9.9, Plotinus was careful enough to describe union apophatically: seeing the One is beyond description<sup>15</sup>. According to Plotinus, the One is the "dispenser" of all things, but itself beyond all things. The One truly is the being-producing overflow of goodness. This is why One, cause, and *ekstasis* are properly henological names; they are proper to the One only insofar as they are negative names.

In short, the ascent of the soul in Enn 4.8.1 is noetic, its language technical: the soul's life is true, utter actuality, divine. On the contrary, the account of ascent in Enn 6.9.9 is transnoetic, and its account apophatic: the union is no longer described as life or actuality or divinity, but as a filling of the soul with a presence that is the One.

We now move on to the Arabic paraphrase of Enn 4.8.1. The following is a schematic representation of the ascent and descent of the soul in *ThA*:

- a. the soul left the body behind and return to herself;
- b. [it rose] to the world of mind
- c. then [rose] to the divine world ... entered the place of splendor and light
- c'. fallen from that lofty and divine place
- b'. "I descend from mind ...
- a'. ... to thought and reflection (24) ... "and am come to the place of thought" (25).

We noted earlier the complex transformation of Enn 4.8.1 in *ThA* 23. The reason for adding a sentence that distinguishes "divine world" from "intelligible world" seems to be the interest to preclude the identification between "coming to be inside oneself" (γινόμενος ... ἐμαυτοῦ εἶσω) and the subsequent "having become one with the divine" (τῷ θεῷ εἰς ταῦτόν γεγενημένος). AP's insistence on distinguishing explicitly between "intelligible world" and "divine world" is evident in the textual divergence with P in the description of "marvelous beauty": P mentions "marvelous beauty" only once, with reference to what is contemplated in the self; AP instead uses the phrase twice:

<sup>15</sup> After union, in descending from the One to *nous*, the mystic's soul is "full of intelligible light — but rather itself pure light — ... having become — but rather being — a god ..." (Enn 6.9.9). In descending to *nous*, it separates from the One and becomes a self-subsistent luminous life.

Then do I see within myself such beauty and splendor as I do remain marveling (22).

And there I see such light and splendor as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend (24).

We noted earlier the surprising Pauline echo in *ThA*. Another Christian element is, arguably, the expression “place of splendor and light,” which we will discuss presently.

### 3. *From Plotinus to Arabic Plotinus: The Intervening Influences*

#### 3.1. “Place,” “Light,” “Glory” in Syriac Christian Theology<sup>16</sup>

While admitting a certain mark left by a “Syriac mind” in the AP, Zimmermann thinks that “too much has been made of a by no means indisputable Syriac colouring” of the text<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence that Syriac-Christian factors shaped Himsi’s *ThA* seems to have a predilection for the terms “place,” “glory,” and “splendor,” for they occur a good number of times in sents. 24 and 25, in descriptions of the divine realm:

there I see such light and splendor... (24)

that light and splendor overwhelm me ... (24).

... thought veils that light and splendor from me (25)

[the soul] entered the place of splendor and light,

which is the cause of all light and splendor (25).

These terms, going back to Biblical usage, came to be technical terms in the vocabulary of ascetical and mystical experience, as used among Christian-Syriac writers and their Rabbinic contemporaries<sup>18</sup>. The evidence is most suggestive in the case of “place.” It certainly is a favorite one of AP’s, which does not appear in P.: twice it is added as a clarification to P’s narration<sup>19</sup>; and in two other instances, “place” appears in passages that are entirely AP’s creation<sup>20</sup>. One wonders about the rationale of introducing this term in the discussion.

<sup>16</sup> For this section and many references to Christian literature, we are indebted to A. GOLITZIN, *The Place of the Presence of God: Aphrahat of Persia’s Portrait of the Christian Holy Man*, in *Synaxis Eucharistias* (Studies in Honor of Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonos Petras, Mount Athos), Athens, 2003, p. 391- 447 (= GOLITZIN, *The Place of the Presence of God*).

<sup>17</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 114.

<sup>18</sup> GOLITZIN, *The Place of the Presence of God*, p. 410.

<sup>19</sup> “Standing in that sublime and divine place” for “being established in it [the divine]” (Sent. 23); “I have fallen from that lofty and divine place” for “I descend” (Sent. 25).

<sup>20</sup> [I] am come to the place of thought (25); [the soul] entered the place of splendor and light (Sent. 25).

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), the text of Exodus 24:9-10 is rendered in a form divergent from the Hebrew. The Masoretic text reads: “Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel.” The LXX inserts a parenthesis in between “saw” and “God” and reads: they saw *the place* (τὸν τόπον) *where stood* the God of Israel<sup>21</sup>. This addition was effective in reducing the somewhat crude anthropomorphism of the Hebrew Exodus 24, and making the text more palatable to the taste of Hellenized Jews (and non-Jewish readers of the Scriptures) in the Alexandrian diaspora; but it also supports the understanding of the vision of God that became prevalent among Jewish and Christian authors. According to Golitzin, “place” (Syriac *atrā*; Hebrew *maqom*) had developed into a *terminus technicus* as early as the fourth century, in both Christian and Rabbinic sources. Its semantic field includes God’s manifestation in the Old Testament accounts, the Temple in Jerusalem, the heavenly dwelling-place (the celestial Temple); it is, finally, used as a stand-in for God himself, a divine name. Similar observations can be made with regards to God’s self-manifestation as “glory” (*iqārā*) or “brilliance” (*zīwā*), so that

all of these associations — the heavenly temple, the throne within it, the radiance, and God himself, together (and this last note is not to the fore in the Jewish literature, at least so far as I know) with God’s eschatological manifestation — lie behind Aphrahat’s use of the phrase ... *that place*<sup>22</sup>.

This continues to be the case for Isaac of Nineveh, Joseph Hazzaya, or John of Dalyatha, Syriac authors of the seventh and eighth centuries<sup>23</sup>. There is, then, a strong probability that the Syriac monk who translated Enn 4.8.1 a century later, attempted in the course of this translation a sort of “clarification” of Plotinus’ text in light of the vocabulary and doctrine of spiritual ascent which he had inherited from his own Christian tradition. This, however, is only part of the explanation.

### 3.2. Neoplatonic Debates on “Place” and “Hypothetical Logoi”<sup>24</sup>

Philosophically educated Christians, such as the Cappadocians or Ps.-Dionysius, are following in the footsteps of Philo and read the ascent of

<sup>21</sup> See GOLITZIN, *The Place of the Presence of God*, p. 407-410.

<sup>22</sup> GOLITZIN, *The Place of the Presence of God*, p. 410.

<sup>23</sup> See the numerous texts quoted and discussed in R. BEULAY, *Lumière sans forme; L’enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha, mystique syro-oriental du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1990 (= BEULAY, *Lumière sans forme*).

<sup>24</sup> For this section we are in debt to I. PERCZEL, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic Theology: A Preliminary Study*, in A.Ph. SEGONDS – C. STEEL (ed.), *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne: Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l’honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, Leuven – Paris, 1998, p. 491-532 (= PERCZEL, *Dionysius and the Platonic Theology*).

Moses into the darkness on Sinai (Exod 20:21), as well as the term “place,” in conjunction with elements drawn from the Platonic tradition.

“Intelligible place/ world” is a Platonic term<sup>25</sup> that became common currency in later Platonism. The use of “place” in connection with the interior journey of the soul is not uncommon in Neoplatonism, whether Plotinus (e.g., *Enn* 5.11.5-9), or Proclus (*Platonic Theology*1:3). In the following section, we examine the possibility that AP is heir to a debate about the extent of the vision of God among Neoplatonists, in which “place” figured prominently.

Proclus and Ps.-Dionysius are major and roughly contemporary representatives of late Neoplatonism<sup>26</sup>. In what follows, three texts will be presented, in order to provide a possible explicative context for *ThA* sent. 25. These texts present the interior ascent of the soul towards the divine, the vision of the divine, and the return from it, and all are using the term “place” in a manner that illumines sent. 25. These texts are Plato, Republic 6 (508C) + 6 (510B-511C), Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 1:3, and Ps.-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1. According to István Perczel, the Ps.-Dionysian text in question is a paraphrase of a text by Proclus, in which, however, certain alterations are operated, in a way similar to AP’s handling of P.

In Rep. 6: 508C Plato presents four realms of existence (two major realms, each subdivided in two), which correspond to four epistemological functions. These four levels are also the stages enumerated in Republic 7 (end of the allegory of the cave), where Plato describes how the newly liberated prisoner must be gradually accustomed to see the sun: first he is given to see shadows, then reflections in water, later things

<sup>25</sup> “The sun is to sight in the visible world what the Good is to mind in the intelligible world (ἐν τῷ νοητῷ τόπῳ Republic 6:508C). Cf. also Alcibiades I (132B): the highest, divine-like *place* in the soul.

<sup>26</sup> Proclus must have flourished before Ps.-Dionysius, since the latter betrays good knowledge of his writings, certainly of his treatment of evil. This was the finding of two groundbreaking studies, quoted by virtually all specialists on Dionysius: H. KOCH, *Proklus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen*, in *Ph* 54 (1895), p. 438-54; J. STIGLMAYR, *Der Neuplatoniker Proklos als Vorlage des sog. Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel*, *HJ* 16, (1895) p. 253-73 and p. 721-48. The investigation of Dionysius’ indebtedness to Proclus is ongoing: see H.D. SAFFREY, *Le lien le plus objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus*, in *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris, 2000, p. 239-252. See also the list of the textual correspondences between *Theol. Plat.* I:1-7 and the Corpus Dionysiacum, in PERCZEL, *Dionysius and the Platonic Theology*, p. 531-532. Describing Dionysius as a Neoplatonist is the general scholarly consensus. Even those authors who emphasizes the biblical and patristic roots of this author (P. ROREM, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols Within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, Toronto, 1984 and A. GOLITZIN, *Et Introibo Ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with Special Reference to its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition (Analekta Vlatadon, 59)*, Thessalonica, 1994), do not deny the fact that Neoplatonism is a major facet of Dionysian thought.

themselves, the sky by night, the moon and stars, and only afterwards the sun.

REALM	FUNCTION
A. Realm of becoming reflections of physical realities (in water etc) physical realities	δόξα (opinion) – εἰκασία (“imagination”)  – πίστις (common-sense belief)
B. Realm of being mathematical realities the divinity	ἐπιστήμη (knowledge) – δίανοια (ratiocination): – νόησις (intuition).

It is important to note the distinction, within the intelligible, between hypothetical knowledge (δίανοια) and non-hypothetical knowledge (νόησις). *Dianoia* proceeds *downwards*, it starts from certain assumptions (taken as principles) and reasons deductively to draw the ensuing conclusions. *Noēsis* proceeds *upwards*: it starts from certain assumptions (taken as hypotheses in the strict sense, τῷ ὄντι, that is, as “steps”) and reasons “upwards” towards the first principle, which is no longer a hypothesis, but “an-hypothetical” principle.

Now to Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* 1:3.

[Plato discovered] this first principle of wholes, which is more excellent than intellect, and is concealed in inaccessible recesses ...

... the genus of gods cannot be apprehended by sense ... nor by opinion or *dianoia*... nor by *noēsis* in conjunction to reason.

For Socrates rightly observed in the “Alcibiades” that the soul, once entering into herself, will behold all other things, and the divinity itself<sup>27</sup>.

For, on the one hand<sup>28</sup>, the soul, when, looking at things that come after herself, beholds the shadows and images of the beings<sup>29</sup>, on the other hand,

<sup>27</sup> The reference here is Alcibiades I (132B – 133C): “Consider; if some one were to say to the eye, ‘See thyself,’ as you might say to a man, ‘Know thyself,’ what is the nature and meaning of this precept? Would not his meaning be: — That the eye should look at that in which it would see itself? ... Then the eye, looking at another eye, and at that in the eye which is most perfect, and which is the instrument of vision, will see itself. But looking at anything else ... it will not see itself. Therefore, if the eye is to see itself, it must look at the eye, and at that part of the eye where the virtue of the eye resides, namely sight. And if the soul, is ever to know herself, she must look at the soul; and especially at that part (τὸν τόπον) of the soul in which her virtue resides, ... that part of our soul which has to do with wisdom and knowledge (περὶ ὃ τὸ εἰδέναι τε καὶ φρονεῖν ἐστίν) ... That part of the soul resembles the divine, and he who looks at this having come to know all things divine (πᾶν τὸ θεῖον γνούς), will be most likely also to know (γνώη) himself.”

<sup>28</sup> The passage is structured as follows: *men... de* (subdivided again: *men...de*) ... *de*

<sup>29</sup> This corresponds to the entire sphere of the visible, the realm of becoming, which is just an image of being. The corresponding faculty is δόξα, subdivided into εἰκασία and πίστις.

once converted to herself, she explicates her own essence, and the reasons which she contains. And at first indeed, she only as it were beholds herself; however, when she penetrates more profoundly into the knowledge of herself, she finds in herself both intellect and the orders of beings<sup>30</sup>. When, again, she proceeds into her interior and the sanctuary as it were of the soul, she contemplates with her eyes closed the genus of gods, and the henads of beings<sup>31</sup>.

For it is lawful for the soul to ascend, till she terminates her flight in the principle of things; but arriving there, beholding the place which is there (τὸν ἐκεῖ τόπον θεασαμένην), descending from there thence, and directing her course through beings ...then we may consider her as possessing the most perfect science of divine natures...

Proclus' series of denials is meant to explain the inadequacy of "regular" epistemological functions to knowledge of the divine: sense apprehends bodily realities, *doxa* and *dianoia* apprehend divisible realities, and *noēsis* is a knowledge of the Ideas, the truly existing beings (τῶν ὄντως ὄντων). How then are we to apprehend the "first principle, which is more excellent than intellect," i.e., the One, beyond the Ideas? In response, he points to the interior journey, as presented in the *Alcibiades* — incidentally, another text in which Plato uses "place" language for the divine!): "once entering into herself, [the soul] will behold all other things, and the divinity itself."

There is a certain epistemological "optimism" in Proclus. Indeed, "in the final stage of the ascent the Proclian *mystes* 'closing his eyes' (μύσασαν) of his soul, 'enters the interior ... and the sanctuary so to speak' of the soul, in order to see (θεάσασθαι) by it the genus of the gods and the henads of the beings (*Theol. Plat* I:3). There ... he touches (συνάπτεισθαι) the ineffable Principle: he affirms that the soul 'terminates her flight in the principle of things.'"<sup>32</sup> In other words, for Proclus the τόπος offers access to "the divinity itself," thus furnishing "the most perfect science of divine natures."

According to Perczel, it is precisely this Proclian passage that Ps.-Dionysius has in mind in a fragment that draws on both the Platonic and the Biblical traditions on "place":

... Then he [the divine Moses] is separated from the many and, with those who are sacred and select, he overtakes the summits of the divine ascents. Yet with these he does not come to be with God himself. He does not see God — for God is unseen — but the place (τὸν τόπον) where God is. This

<sup>30</sup> This corresponds to the lower level of the intelligible realm: the mathematical realities, perceived by δῖανοια.

<sup>31</sup> This corresponds to the higher level of the intelligible realm: the divine realities, perceived by νόησις.

<sup>32</sup> PERCZEL, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic Theology*, p. 524.

signifies to me that the most divine and highest of what is seen and intelligible are certain hypothetical logoi (ὑποθετικούς τινὰς εἶναι λόγους) of what is subordinate to that beyond-having all. Through these [hypothetical logoi] is shown forth the presence of that which walks upon the intelligible summits of its most holy places<sup>33</sup>.

Dionysius clearly distinguishes between God *as he is* (namely “unseen,” i.e., uncommunicated), and God *as he is seen*: Moses “does not see God ... but the place where God is.” This is, of course, very similar to the statement in Ep 1 (1065A): “If someone sees God and has understood what has been seen, he has not seen God but something of what is and what is known of God, τὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ τῶν ὄντων καὶ γιγνωσκομένων.” These ὄντα and γιγνωσκομένα seem to be the equivalent of τόπος.

It is obvious that in the background of Ps.-Dionysius’ statements lies the Biblical and Christian tradition of Sinai and the “place.” But the Ps.-Areopagite has recourse to the Platonic tradition as well: what is seen, i.e., “the place,” is to be understood as “certain hypothetical logoi”, through which the presence of God is apprehended. In light of Republic 6 (511C) to which Ps.-Dionysius alludes, this means that the “an-hypothetical principle” lies beyond this sort of vision and understanding. Indeed, Moses “abandons those who see and what is seen,” and advances *beyond* this stage into the darkness of unknowing, “knowing *beyond* intellect by knowing nothing.”

There is, of course, no way of certifying whether or not AP was aware of precisely those texts that were discussed above. Without being able to say anything more precise, we find that there is ground enough for the suggestion that AP’s use of the term “place” may be echoing a debate about the extent of the divine vision, exemplified by the positions of Proclus and Ps.-Dionysius.

This insight is particularly useful for an understanding of the intriguing passage in sent. 25: “[the soul] entered the place of splendor and light, which is the cause of all light and splendor.” The couple “x and cause of x” (whereas “x” can be Light, Being, Divinity, Life, Wisdom, Power, etc) is a frequent occurrence in Neoplatonic authors, and certainly abounds in Dionysius<sup>34</sup>. The function of such statements is to restrict predication about the divine to what Adamson terms “predication by causality” and “predication by eminence”: “if A is the cause of B,

<sup>33</sup> Mystical Theology I:3.

<sup>34</sup> Discussing the possible Dionysian influence on AP, Adamson notes that “no ancient text sets forth the dialectic of predication by causality and eminence as dramatically as does the *Divine Names*” (ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 165).

and B is F, then A is F *and not-F*,” whereas “the F-ness of A is superior to the F-ness of B.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, God can be called “splendor and light” only inasmuch as He is *cause* of splendor and light; His being splendor and light is superior to the corresponding qualities of the soul<sup>36</sup>. These conclusions cohere perfectly with my earlier observation about AP’s effort to make the distinction between “intelligible world” and “divine world” as explicit as possible.

One can extend Adamson’s verdict on AP’s notion of the “learned ignorance” to concepts such as “place,” “glory,” and “light,” and affirm that

certainly, the Adaptor did not take the notion ... from the parallel text in Plotinus. Rather, one has the sense that he came to the text with this doctrine in hand, and saw the passages [in Plotinus] as an opportunity for a digression on the subject<sup>37</sup>.

One more observation in relation to “place.” When Ps.-Dionysius explains, in his *Mystical Theology* I:3, that this “place” shows forth “the presence of that which walks upon the intelligible summits,” and adds immediately that Moses was called to advance *beyond* this point, into darkness, there may be even more to the text. First, the two aspects of God — “presence” and “darkness” — are intimately linked: Ep. 5 (1073) equates “the divine darkness” with “the light in which God is said to dwell” (1 Tim 6:16). Second, the articulation between darkness and light, divine hiddenness, and divine manifestation is treated in Ep. 3 (1069 B) with reference to Christ. After a study on this very subject, whose argumentation we will not reproduce here, Golitzin comes to the conclusion that “the παρουσία [or presence] of God in his most holy places signified for Dionysius both light and Christ<sup>38</sup>.” This would fit perfectly with another element peculiar to the Syriac tradition, namely the traditional use of “presence” (*šekintā*) as a Christological title<sup>39</sup>. Aside from the fact, noted earlier, that a connection between Enn 4.8.1 and 2 Cor 12:1-4 was already established in earlier Christian tradition, the Christological connotation of the divine “place” could explain why *ThA* is recasting the Plotinian contemplation in Christian terms.

<sup>35</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 101 and p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed presentation of AP’s apophatic concerns, see ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 118-119.

<sup>37</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 90.

<sup>38</sup> GOLITZIN, *Revisiting the ‘Sudden’: Epistle III in the Corpus Dionysiacum*, in *StPatr*, 37 (2001), p. 482-491.

<sup>39</sup> See N. SÉD, *La shekinta et ses amis araméens (Corpus Orientalis, 20)*, Geneva, 1988, p. 233-247.

It is our contention that AP reflects a fairly technical understanding of this word, rooted in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and prominent among Syriac Christian ascetic writers long before al-Himsī. On the other hand, we argue that AP also offers a theological corrective, borrowed from the Christian Neoplatonism of Ps.-Dionysius, to the views of Proclus: the summit of the interior journey is not God himself, but rather his manifestation, his presence, or the “place” where he shows himself.

#### 4. Further Confirmation of the Christian Elements: *ThA* and The Pagan Philosophers

Starting with sent. 27, the text progresses into a collection of “testimonies” to the same mystical experience, gleaned from philosophical authorities (Heraclitus, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato). What is especially noteworthy is the strident hortatory tone in AP in comparison to the more expository one in P, and the presence of certain Christianizing accents. P’s simple quotes from Heraclitus (“change reposes,” and “it is weariness to keep toiling at the same things and always beginning again”) appears metamorphosed, in sent. 28, into a sermon-like statement about the [ascetic] toils that will be “rewarded” in “that world” where “there is not fatigue and no toil.”

Similarly, P’s sober notes about Empedocles and Pythagoras are heavily edited, to the effect that in *ThA* both take on the traits of a Christian preacher of repentance and asceticism: Empedocles “calls men *at the top of his voice*,” he “*bids* people to *reject this world*,” (Pythagoras “*ordered* them to abandon and *reject this world*”), to “*ask pardon* of God” inasmuch as they are all, like Empedocles, “fugitive(s) from *the anger* of God.”

The Christian overtones of the “rather Christ-like description of Empedocles’ being sent to our world” have been noted by Adamson, following a suggestion by Richard Taylor<sup>40</sup>. But more can be said about this fragment. We would suggest that the Christian Adaptor must have had in mind not so much a comparison with Christ (Empedocles as “Christ-like”), but rather one between the pre-Christian philosophers and the Old Testament prophets, culminating with John the Baptist. Not only does the call to repentance in AP’s version of Empedocles echo the

<sup>40</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 176. On p. 224 (n. 12), ADAMSON writes: “I am indebted to Richard Taylor for pointing out to me the Christian overtones of this passage.”

Biblical report about John the Baptist, but such a comparison could claim rich precedence in Christian tradition, in philosophically trained authors such as Justin Martyr (2nd century), Clement of Alexandria (3rd century), or Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century), for whom philosophy is fundamentally good, a gift of God to the Gentiles equivalent to the Mosaic Law, and who commonly view Heraclitus, Empedocles, Socrates and Plato as precursors of Christ equivalent to the prophets<sup>41</sup>.

It seems, then, that we can isolate a precise element that shaped the way in which the Adaptor chose to paraphrase the *Enneads* at this point. Zimmermann describes the style of the paraphrase in the following terms: “bold paraphrase, flamboyant (often obscure) vocabulary, and certain set phrases. Whether it is a period style, a regional style, a Melkite style, a professional style, or just the style of the circle of Kindi remains to be established.<sup>42</sup>” We would add that al-Himsī’s style allows him to introduce a traditional *topos* of early Christian literature.

But why would a ninth-century author make use of a *topos* that had been operative *before* the legalization of Christianity, and that gradually gave way to positions less favorable to philosophy and the philosophers? The answer resides, we argue, in the political and cultural context of the “Christian Hellenist,” as Zimmermann calls al-Himsī. First we have to consider the agenda behind al-Kindī’s circle of translators:

Himsi’s interest is ... in selling *philosophy*, the whole, monolithic achievement of centuries of *Greek* thought. And here we have his true bias. He writes not as a Christian, but as a Hellenist;

<sup>41</sup> For Clement of Alexandria, for instance, philosophy is an “image of truth, a divine gift to the Greeks” and can be used as “a common exercise demonstrative of the faith” (*Strom.* 1:2:19-20 [p. 13]); “... before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration... For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testament; and of others by consequence, as philosophy.” “... philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a schoolmaster to bring the Hellenic mind, as the law, the Hebrews, to Christ. Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ. “But as the encyclical branches of study contribute to philosophy, which is their mistress; so also philosophy itself co-operates for the acquisition of wisdom” (*Strom* 1:5:28 [p. 17-18]); “But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light.... Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians, who have aspired after the truth,... produce whatever they have of the word of truth” (*Strom* 1:13:57 [p. 36]); “Whether, then, they say that the Greeks gave forth some utterances of the true philosophy by accident, it is the accident of a divine administration. Or were one, on the other hand, to say that the Greeks possessed a natural conception of these things, we know the one Creator of nature. And by reflection and direct vision, those among the Greeks who have philosophized accurately, see God” (*Strom* 2:19:94 [p. 60]). The page numbers between square brackets refer to the second volume of the GCS critical edition: O. STÄHLIN – L. FRÜCHTEL – U. TREU (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, 4th ed, Berlin, 1985 —.

<sup>42</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 112.

... they were unabashed Hellenists in their propagation of *falsafa* ... not necessarily as the last word in theology, but certainly as the first;  
 ... they were Hellenists working for a philosophical universe Muslim and Christian intellectuals would find equally congenial.<sup>43</sup>

The introduction of a Christian *topos* designed to argue the harmony between philosophy and Revelation, to make readers at home with philosophy, and to highlight the benefits of reading the Greeks, appears perfectly consistent with the ideological program directing al-Himsī's translation.

Second, we recall that "the history of Graeco-Syrian translation to some extent repeated itself in Arabic.<sup>44</sup>" This idea is, of course, an explanation of why a Syriac author of the ninth century translated Greek materials into Arabic using the same manner (namely "loose paraphrase") that had been used many centuries earlier in translating philosophical texts into Syriac, but "which went out of fashion in the sixth century.<sup>45</sup>" Similarly, we argue that a *topos* that proved successful in a period of early contacts between Christian theology and Greek philosophy may well have reoccurred in the pioneering phase of contacts between Greek philosophy and Islam. And the fact that the *topos* was introduced by a Christian translator, who was certainly aware of earlier Christians that had also written as "unabashed Hellenists," using philosophy "not necessarily as the last word in theology, but certainly as the first,<sup>46</sup>" and working to make their Christian readers at home with philosophy, lends more weight to this hypothesis.

## Conclusions

Our treatment of the ascent of the soul in Plotinus' Enn. 4.8.1 and its Arabic paraphrase was prompted by the following question: what could have transformed Plotinus into the often so different sounding "Arabic Plotinus"?

To answer this question, it is important first to note a crucial element of the Plotinian text: the ascent of the soul in Enn 4.8.1 is noetic, as opposed to Enn 6.9.9, where it is transnoetic. In *ThA*'s paraphrase of Enn 4.8.1, however, it seems that the noetic and transnoetic accounts are conflated to give a complete description of mystical life.

<sup>43</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 123, 133, 142.

<sup>44</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 115.

<sup>46</sup> ZIMMERMANN, *The Origins*, p. 133.

Moreover, the translator approaches Plotinus with the reading lens of Christian tradition. This conclusion is suggested by the following elements: the Scriptural allusions, the clothing metaphors, the language of “splendor,” “glory,” and “place,” the treatment of pagan philosophers in accordance with an established Patristic precedent, finally, the influence of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.

On this last point, we find it impossible to agree with Adamson when he claims that “the only thing that Dionysius could have given the Adaptor is the basic idea of calling transcendent knowledge ‘ignorance’.<sup>47</sup>” If, as we have argued in the foregoing pages, al-Himsī is an heir to Ps.-Dionysius’ fusion of Syriac Christian and Greek philosophical uses of “place” language, there is now even more evidence for D’Ancona Costa’s already richly substantiated thesis that the Neoplatonism of the Ps.-Areopagitica was an important factor in shaping the *ThA*’s reworking of Plotinus and the reworking of Proclus in the *Liber de Causis*<sup>48</sup>. When considering the relevance of Ps.-Dionysius, however, it is not enough to recall the circulation of Sergius of Reshaina’s Syriac translation and to analyze the presence of certain Dionysian elements in the *ThA*. We must also keep in mind that for al-Himsī, Ps.-Dionysius was not a fifth-century anonymous Neoplatonist, but rather the eminent disciple of St Paul. Therefore, far from being a library item, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* constituted an authority in line with Scripture and with “fathers” such as Gregory of Nyssa, Ps.-Macarius, or Evagrius Ponticus, and was read as such — namely as part of and in light of Christian tradition. In fact, al-Himsī most likely absorbed the particular Dionysian notion of transcendent knowledge as “ignorance” from earlier Syriac Christian tradition, where this seems to have been more than a “basic idea” since it commanded great attention and authority<sup>49</sup>.

Finally, a punctual contribution of this essay concerns the relation between al-Himsī, the translator of the *ThA*, and al-Kindī, who is supposed to have “corrected” the text. Weighing the two major hypotheses — “the Kindi hypothesis” (a literal translation by al-Himsī with all the original elaborations imposed by a zealously editorializing al-Kindī) and the “Himsi hypothesis” (a purely Himsian production with a mere crossing of t’s and dotting of i’s on al-Kindī’s part) — Adamson stated the following in the concluding chapter of his monograph: “If we could discern some Christian doctrines lurking in AP this would point emphati-

<sup>47</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 109.

<sup>48</sup> D’ANCONA COSTA, *Recherches*, esp. p. 116-118; 147-152.

<sup>49</sup> BEULAY, *Lumière sans forme*, p. 158-183.

cally towards al-Himsī. Such doctrines can be found in the text, though they are ... minimal ...<sup>50</sup>” The conclusions reached in this essay evidently support to the “Himsī hypothesis.”

Marquette University  
519 N., 20 St., Apt. 9,  
Milwaukee, WI 53233, U.S.A.  
cristina.bucur@mu.edu

Cristina BUCUR, Bogdan G. BUCUR

*Abstract* — The Arabic paraphrase of Enn 4.8.1 seems to conflate the noetic and transnoetic accounts found in the Plotinian corpus, in order to furnish a complete depiction of the mystical life. In its own account of the ascent of the soul, the *Theology of Aristotle* uses terms drawn from the vocabulary of Syriac Christian ascetical and mystical literature, and appears to be aware of certain debates between various types of pagan and Christian Neoplatonism. Moreover, its treatment of pagan philosophers follows an established Patristic *topos*. It appears, therefore, that the use of Christian elements in the *Theology of Aristotle* is not minimal and accidental, but rather purposeful, relatively numerous and substantial. The conclusions reached in this essay lend additional support to the so-called Himsī hypothesis, and to Cristina D’Ancona Costa’s already richly substantiated thesis that the Neoplatonism of the Ps.-Areopagitica was an important factor in shaping the Arabic adoption and adaptation of Plotinus and Proclus.

<sup>50</sup> ADAMSON, *Arabic Plotinus*, p. 176.

## APPENDIX

PLOTINUS ARABUS, <i>Theology of Aristotle</i> (tr. Zimmermann)	PLOTINUS, <i>Ennead</i> 4:8:1 (tr. A. H. Armstrong)
<p>21. Often have I been alone with my soul and have doffed my body and laid it aside and become as if I were naked substance without a body, so as to be inside myself, outside all other things [at the same time knowledge, knower and thing known].</p> <p>22. Then do I see within myself such beauty and splendor [and light] as I do remain marveling at and astonished, so that I know that I am one of the parts of the sublime, surpassing, lofty, divine world, and possess active life.</p> <p>23. When I am certain of that, I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine world and become as if I were placed in it and cleaving to it, so as to be above the entire intelligible world, and seem to be standing in that sublime and divine place.</p> <p>24. And there I see such light and splendor as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend. When that light and splendor overwhelm me and I have not strength to endure it, I descend from mind to thought and reflection.</p> <p>25. When I enter the world of thought, thought veils that light and splendor from me, and</p> <p>I am left wondering how I have fallen from that lofty and divine place and am come to the place of thought, when my soul once had the power to leave her body behind and return to herself and rise to the world of mind and then to the divine world until she entered the place of splendor and light, which is the cause of all light and splendor.</p> <p>26. Wonderful it is too how I have seen my soul filled with light, while she was still in the body like her appearance, not leaving it.</p> <p>27. But when I think long and cast my gaze about and am like one bemused,</p>	<p>Often I have woken up out of the body to my self and have entered into myself, going out from all other things;</p> <p>I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality, setting myself above all else in the realm of Intellect.</p> <p>Then after that rest in the divine,</p> <p>when I have come down from Intellect to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is what it has shown itself to be by itself, even when it is in the body.</p> <p>Heraclitus,</p>

<p>I remember Heraclitus, for he ordered that one should seek and inquire about the sublime substance of the soul and should desire to ascend to that sublime and exalted world.</p> <p>28. He said: "Who desires that and raised himself up to the exalted world is necessarily requited with the best of all possible rewards. No one must neglect the search and the desire to raise himself into that world, though he suffer fatigue and toil, for before him there is that ease after which there is no fatigue and no toil."</p> <p>29. His intention in these words is to incite us to seek the intelligible things, that we may find them as he found them and attain them as he attained them.</p> <p>30. Now Empedocles says that the souls were in the high and sublime place, and when they erred they fell into this world;</p> <p>31. It was as a fugitive from the anger of God that he too came to this world, for when he came down to this world he came to help those souls whose minds have become contaminated, and became like a madman, calling men at the top of his voice and bidding them to reject this world and what is in it and to go back to their own original world, the high and sublime.</p> <p>32. And he bade them ask pardon of God, that they might thereby attain the ease and well-being that was their state before.</p> <p>33. With this the philosopher Pythagoras agreed in his summons to mankind, though it was in parables and enigmas that he spoke to them; he ordered them to abandon and reject this world and to return to the first, the real world....</p>	<p>who urges us to investigate this,</p> <p>positing "necessary changes" and "changing it is at rest," and "weariness to toil at and be subjected to the same things,"</p> <p>has left us guessing, since he has neglected to make clear to us what he is saying, perhaps because we ought to seek by ourselves, as he himself sought and found.</p> <p>And Empedocles, when he said that it is a law that sinful souls should fall into this world,</p> <p>and that he himself has come here as "an exile from the country of the gods" who "put his trust in raving strife,"</p> <p>revealed just as much as the riddling statements of Pythagoras and his followers about this, and many other matters (and, besides, he is unclear because he writes poetry).</p>
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